

In the Specification:

Please replace paragraphs [0003], [0005], and [0032] with the following replacement paragraphs.

[0003] Processing and storage of electronic data is now essential to the daily operation of most organizations. With the advent of networking technology, organizations that utilize electronic data processing are becoming increasingly reliant upon “enterprise” computer networks in which processing and storage are distributed over a number of heterogeneous interconnected computers. In many enterprise systems, a member of the organization will have access to multiple resources across the system. For example, an employee of a corporation may use an email account, an operating system account, such as a Windows NT™ account, and a Unix™ account to access and process data stored on the enterprise system (“Windows NT” and “Unix” as used herein are trademarks of their respective owners). Additionally, organizations will often wish to provide external users, such as distributors, business partners and suppliers, with accounts granted limited access to the data stored on the enterprise system. The administrative overhead required to manage the internal and external accounts often becomes more difficult to manage than the data that is actually of interest to the organization. This can lead to decreases in system efficiency and to high support costs.

[0005] Most prior art systems management techniques address these difficulties by centralizing data. Profile-based management systems, directory-based management systems, and meta-directories offer various approaches to centralizing data storage. FIGURE 1 illustrates the limitations of prior art systems that rely on centralization of data. FIGURE 1 is a diagrammatic representation of computer system 100 comprising an administrative system 110, including a centralized database 112, and resources including an email server 120 (such as a Microsoft Exchange™ server), a Unix system 125, a Windows NT system 130 and a mainframe 135 (“Microsoft Exchange” as used herein is a trademark of its respective owner). The resources are interconnected to each other and are connected to administrative system 100 via a network 145. Each resource can contain

a collection of data items that represent entities or individuals. For example, e-mail server 120 can contain a collection of email accounts 150, Unix system 125 can contain a collection of Unix accounts 155, Windows NT system 130 can contain a collection of Windows NT accounts 160 and mainframe 135 can contain a collection of data records 165.

[0032] Software program 240 can invoke resource adapter modules 325 to communicate with a database system, such as an OracleTM database system 210, Unix system 212, and NT system 214 (“Oracle” as used herein is a trademark of its respective owner). It should be noted that the resource adapter modules described are provided by way of example only. One resource adapter module 325 is typically operable to communicate with a particular resource type (e.g., one resource adapter 325 can be invoked to communicate with all the Unix systems), however separate resource adapter modules 325 can also be used for each resource, as illustrated in FIGURE 3. As would be understood by one of ordinary skill in the art, resource adapter module 325 can also be custom programmed to communicate with any resource type.